

SUBJECT: Crash Investigations	NUMBER: 2-16.01
EFFECTIVE DATE:	REVIEW DATE:
NMMLEPSC STANDARDS: OPR.07.07, OPR.07.08, OPR.07.09, OPR.07.10	APPROVED: Sheriff

## I. **POLICY**

The Valencia County Sheriff's Department utilizes the New Mexico Uniform Traffic Crash report form to investigate all motor vehicle crashes that occur within the County of Valencia.

## II. **RULES AND REGULATIONS**

### A. Responsibilities

1. As a general rule, the first responding deputy should take charge of the scene until relieved of such duties.
2. Deputies responding to the scene of a reported crash have the following responsibilities:
  - a) Determine the need, if any, for EMS response;
  - b) Identify potential or actual fire hazards or dangerous conditions so that appropriate action can be taken;
  - c) Determine the need for additional assistance;
  - d) Protect the scene;
  - e) Establish safe movement of traffic around the crash scene.
  - f) Collect the necessary information to complete a thorough investigation and file a report.
  - g) Locate witnesses and record their statements on one or all of the above crash reports.
  - h) Obtain driver statements
  - i) Complete a New Mexico Uniform Traffic Crash Report
3. Deputies should expedite the removal of debris and vehicles from the roadway.
4. A diagram of the crash scene is standard procedure for crashes involving a fatality, injury, or property damage over \$500. Exigent circumstances may require the involved vehicle be moved without completion of a diagram. If this occurs, such action should be documented in the narrative of the report. Exigent circumstances may include, but not be limited to:
  - a) Severe weather, or

- b) When public safety outweighs the need for a diagram.
  - c) If the crash does not involve injury, the deputy may elect to record measurements in the narrative section of their report in lieu of a diagram.
- 5. If fire and/or hazardous materials are discovered to play an important role which could hamper the investigation, the policy covering hazardous material response will be followed. The crash investigation will become a secondary issue.
- 6. If the driver or occupant of a person involved in a traffic crash cannot secure their Personal property (i.e. purses, wallets, jewelry, firearms and large sums of cash), the property should be turned over to a family member or placed into evidence for safe keeping (in accordance with the evidence policy) unless otherwise directed by a shift supervisor. The deputy will attempt to have all personal property delivered back to the owner in a timely manner. If the deputy has trouble contacting the owner the deputy can request assistance from the evidence custodian.
- 7. Vehicles which are disabled due to the traffic crash will be towed as authorized by the deputy, the driver or registered owner. If authorized by the deputy a completed towed vehicle report will be attached to the crash report and a copy will be given to the towing service.
- 8. Occasionally responding deputies may find involved parties of a crash engaged in a dispute. The resolution of this dispute should take precedence over the crash investigation. If necessary, additional deputies should be requested in order to complete the investigation and resolve the disturbance as quickly as possible.

## B. Crashes Involving Damage Or Injury

- 1. Upon arriving at the scene of a crash if the investigating deputy determines that the damage to the vehicles is over \$500.00 or an injury is reported, the New Mexico Uniform Traffic Crash Report will be completed.
- 2. If both vehicles are still in their final resting positions upon deputy(s) arrival, measurements of the crash scene will be taken and included in the crash report narrative. A diagram will be completed for all injury crashes and/or court cases.

Included in this diagram will be:

- a) The final resting positions of the vehicle(s) involved;
- b) Any fixed objects involved in the crash;
- c) Final resting positions of any pedestrians or bicyclists Involved;
- d) Any other vehicles or fixed objects that might have Contributed to the crash;
- e) Any physical evidence left on the roadway (skid marks, Gouges, scratches, yaws, debris, etc.); and
- f) Anything that might assist in a thorough and complete investigation of the crash.

### C. Private Property Crashes

1. An investigation and report will be made on crashes occurring on private property in the following instances; otherwise a Self Crash Report will be utilized.
  - a) If there is injury as a result of the crash;
  - b) If the motor vehicle collides with and damages a building; or
  - c) Enforcement will be taken when indicators are present that a person could be driving under the influence of intoxicants or reckless driving.
  - d) The shift supervisor has the ultimate authority in determining what types of private property crashes require a report by a deputy.

2. Hit and run crashes on private property will be handled in the following manner.

The words "Private Property" will be checked on the New Mexico Uniform Traffic Crash Report and all known information will be listed on the form.

3. Nothing in this section applies to the investigation of motor vehicle crashes, which originated on public roadways and come to final position within the bounds of private property.

### D. Fatal Crash Investigation

1. Once a deputy arrives at the scene and it is determined that the crash is a fatal or is likely to be a fatal, the on duty supervisor will be notified along with the Chain of Command. If no supervisor is on duty, one will be contacted. The on duty supervisor will supervise all activities at the scene of a fatal crash. The on duty supervisor will assign deputies to perform tasks relating to the crash, and make notifications to the District Attorney's Office and OMI.
  - a) Once a deputy arrives at the scene and it is determined that the crash is involving a fatality, the scene will be secured and treated as a crime scene.
  - b) Upon arrival of supervisors, all information that has been obtained prior to their arrival will be relayed to them.  
If a deputy has witness information this information will be given to the investigating deputy.
    - i. If possible, all witnesses will be held at the scene until they can be interviewed by the investigating deputy.
    - ii. If the witness has been allowed to leave, the deputy receiving the information and statement from the witness will complete a supplement with the witness' statement.
  - c) The on duty supervisor or his appointee will ensure that there are enough units present at the scene to provide adequate crowd and traffic control. The scene will remain secure until released by the investigating deputies.

- d) The Field Services Supervisor or his appointee will ensure that only necessary personnel are allowed into the scene.
- e) The Field Services Supervisor will be responsible for ensuring that the proper reports have been completed and submitted.
- f) In the event a crash investigator is not available, the on duty supervisor will contact New Mexico State Police or an agency with qualified investigators.

2. Commercial Truck and Bus

If a commercial truck or bus is involved in a crash, the deputy shall request the New Mexico Motor Transportation Department for an inspection if available.

3. Hazardous Materials

- a) Hazardous Materials are defined as those substances, which in quantity or form, constitute an unreasonable risk to the health and welfare of the public. They fall into the categories of gases, liquids, explosives, oxidizers, solids, corrosives, poisons, and radioactive materials.
- b) The primary responsibility of the Valencia County Sheriff's Department at the scene of a Hazardous Material spill is containment, evacuation and/or crowd control.
- c) The New Mexico State Police will be contacted for an incident involving a hazardous materials spill.

4. Follow Up Investigations

If a follow-up investigation is required for a reported crash, it is the responsibility of the original investigating deputy. If information is obtained by a secondary deputy, that deputy will complete a supplemental report and ensure that a copy is forwarded to the original investigating deputy. Any supplemental information should be documented as soon as the information becomes known.